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Security Dismissal Boards Proposed for U.S.

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 13 — The Office of Personnel Management is seeking to revive a long dormant procedure to summarily dismiss Federal employees suspected of threatening national security.

The disclosure of the effort came in a letter from the head of the personnel office asking the Defense Department and the military services to nominate officials to sit on boards that could be quickly formed to suspend and remove such Federal employees.

It was the second disclosure this week of efforts by the Government to tighten security in the wake of the recent wave of espionage cases. The White House disclosed Wednesday that President Reagan signed a secret directive Nov. 1 ordering more widespread use of polygraph, or lie-detector, tests for Administration officials with access to highly sensitive information.

The Office of Personnel Management is an independent agency with overall responsibility for the recruitment, training and benefits of all Federal employees.

Response Being Pondered

A top Defense Department official, who asked not to be identified, said today that no final decision had been made on how the department would respond to the request.

There are slightly more than three million civilian employees in the Federal Government, about one-third of whom work in the Defense Department. In addition, there are two million military personnel.

Representative Patricia Schroeder, Democrat of Colorado, chairman of the House Civil Service Subcommittee, said the process suggested by the personnel office appeared to be "the product of a spy fever that now is running

through Washington bureaucrats."

Mrs. Schroeder, who obtained a copy of the letter, said that security hearing boards were formed for a brief period in the McCarthy anti-Communist era in the 1950's and then "fell into disuse."

Representative Don Edwards, Democrat of California, chairman of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, said that he felt the nation was sliding "back to the 1950's, back to the House Un-American Activities Committee and back to trial without due process." He added, "We can't let this get started again."

The request that the services nominate people who could serve on the boards came from Constance Horner, director of the personnel office.

"Recent events have increased the possibility that it may be necessary to convene security hearing boards to hear cases of the summary suspension and removal of Federal employees in the interest of national security," Mrs. Horner wrote.

James C. Lafferty, spokesman for the personnel office, said that the request for the nominees had been made on the recommendation of the Army and the Navy. He said their request had been brought on by the case of Samuel Loring Morrison, a Navy civilian employee who was sentenced to two years in jail Dec. 2 after being convicted of supplying a classified photograph of a Russian ship to a British publication.

Mr. Lafferty said that Mr. Morrison had resigned and thus made the formation of a security board unnecessary in his case but that the two services believed such procedures should be quickly available to them.

Mrs. Horner said all nominees must meet a number of criteria. These included being competent and disinterested, having undergone security background checks and not being personnel security officers.

In separate letters to Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger and the Secretaries of the Army, Navy and Air Force, Mrs. Horner requested that they each furnish her office with a list of 10 nominees for membership on the security boards.

According to Mrs. Schroeder, the security boards were first authorized by a 1950 law that permitted the summary removal of an employee when the head of an agency "considers that action necessary in the interests of national security."

In 1953, President Eisenhower issued an executive order detailing procedures for how the boards would operate. She said a few attempts had been made to remove employees under the section after the publication of Eisenhower's order and the procedure then fell into disuse.

In separate cases in 1956, 1957 and 1959, the Supreme Court reversed three attempts by Federal agencies to remove employees under the procedure. But the decisions were on relatively narrow grounds and the Court did not invalidate the original law.